Supporter Impact Report
2025/26

RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC

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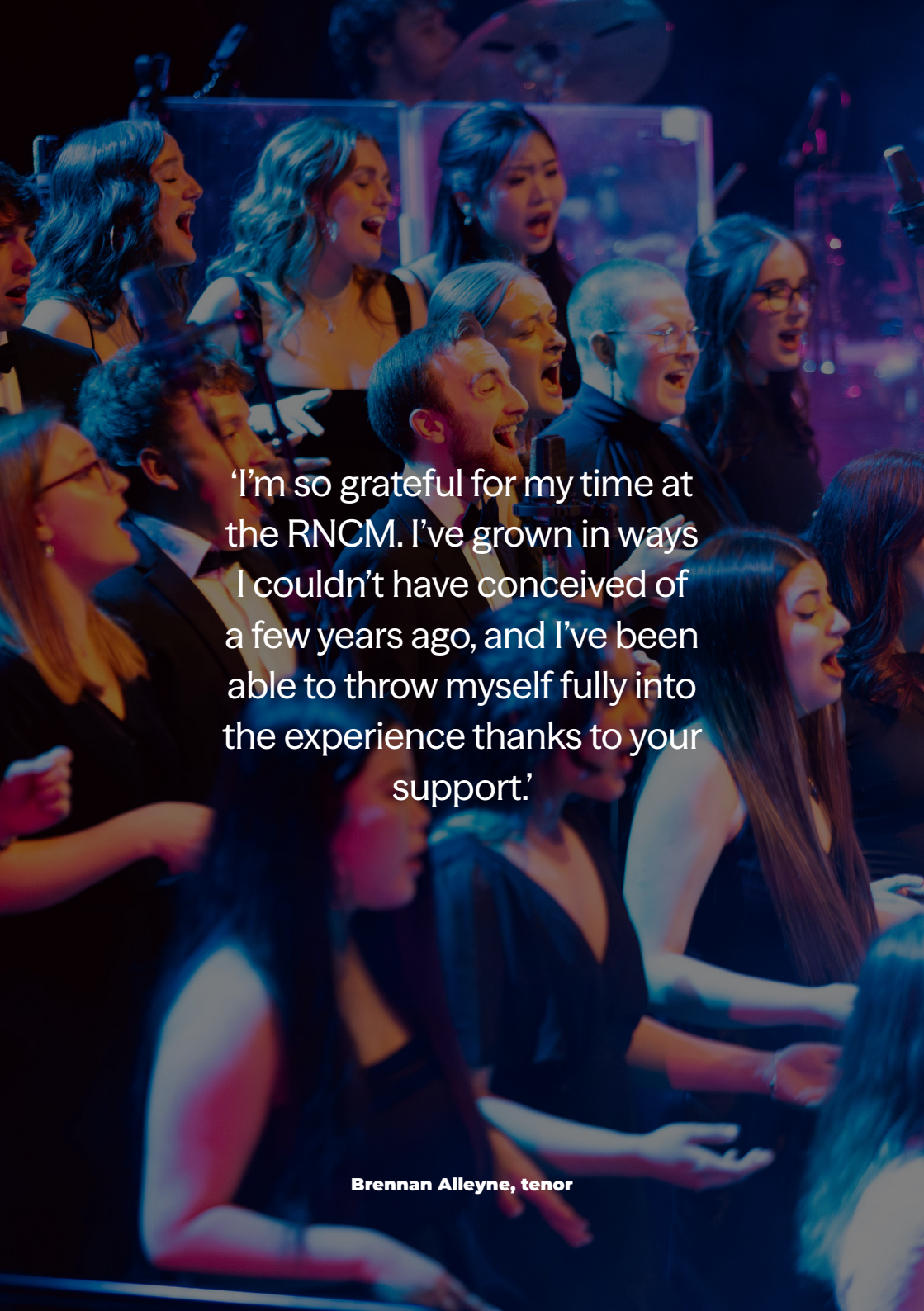

‘I’m so grateful for my time at the RNCM. I’ve grown in ways I couldn’t have conceived of a few years ago, and I’ve been able to throw myself fully into the experience thanks to your support.’

Brennan Alleyne, tenor

Thank you

At the RNCM, we are proud to be a world-leading conservatoire with deep roots in Manchester and an impact that reaches far beyond the city. Every year, our students, staff, alumni, and supporters remind me of the extraordinary role music can play in people's lives.

One of my highlights each year is sitting down to read this report, which brings together the remarkable breadth of what financial support makes possible across the RNCM. From helping students access and complete their training, to creating exceptional artistic, professional, and community opportunities, philanthropy touches every area of our work.

As we prepare to launch our new 10-year strategic plan, I have been reflecting on the principles that continue to guide us: excellence across genres, creativity and experimentation, inclusivity, and a commitment to preparing students not only to enter the music profession with confidence, but to help shape its future.

We also know that, in a funding landscape where much arts philanthropy is concentrated in London and the South East, our supporters play an especially important role. Your generosity helps ensure that exceptional musical talent, creativity, and opportunity can flourish here in Manchester, across the North, and beyond.

Thank you for your belief in the RNCM, your investment in our students, and your commitment to powering the music of tomorrow.

Professor Linda Merrick CBE
Principal

Thanks to you, we...

RAISED

£3,925,000

£2,825,000 received
and **£1,100,000** pledged

OFFERED

287 student awards

272 scholarships and bursaries
11 Junior Fellowships
4 International Artist Diplomas

GAVE

1 in 3 students

financial support to help them through the year

ENGAGED

Over 11,900

children, young people, and members of the local community in music engagement activities

RNCM Awards: Student Financial Support

Student awards – scholarships and bursaries – play a vital role in helping talented musicians make the most of their time at the RNCM, giving them the space to focus on their development, embrace transformative opportunities, and prepare for sustainable careers.

This support recognises excellence, widens access, and helps ensure that musical potential is not limited by financial circumstance. As the costs of study and living continue to rise, it gives students the confidence and stability to thrive.

'I step out into the profession with an abundance of experiences and opportunities that have enriched my CV, and far greater maturity as both a singer and a person. Without your support, this would not have been possible, and I feel endlessly grateful to be pursuing something I love so deeply and to have the opportunity to build a career from this wonderful gift.'

Esther Shea, soprano

'I want to thank you for the support you give to people like me. I have benefitted massively from it, meaning I can really make the most of my studies here at the RNCM. It means the absolute world, and I know I wouldn't be where I am now without it.'

Isobel Street, trombone

'Thank you for believing in me and for being such an important part of my journey as a musician. Without your support, I would likely have had to postpone my dream of continuing my studies or return to my home country, where opportunities are limited. Your kindness has opened doors that might otherwise have remained closed, and I cannot adequately express how much this means to me.'

Marcelo Nunes Rodrigues, double bass

'As a mature student balancing academic commitments, your support has helped ease financial pressures and allowed me to focus fully on making the most of my studies. Your investment in my education is having a tangible impact on my career, enabling me to gain valuable experience, pursue ambitious opportunities, and continue growing as a musician. Thank you for your generosity and confidence in my potential.'

Christopher Binns, conducting

ABRSM

The longstanding and unique partnership between the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and the RNCM continues to play a vital role in supporting our mission. Through its support of the Royal Schools and extensive scholarships programme, ABRSM helps promote access, progression, and excellence in music education.

We are grateful for ABRSM's continued support of our students and its longstanding commitment to nurturing future generations of musicians.

17

RNCM students benefited from ABRSM scholarships this year

RNCM Engage

RNCM Engage is our award-winning programme for under-18s, carefully designed to raise musical attainment – from first access through to elite training – creating progression pathways to higher music education and beyond.

The reach of RNCM Engage is extensive, each year offering thousands of children and young people opportunities to participate projects spanning a broad range of disciplines, instrumental families, and levels of musical experience. Here, we shine a light on those made possible through philanthropy.

RNCM Young Artists

This year, **66 Young Artists** took part in our popular music programme for 11-18-year-olds. Through Saturday sessions in composition, production, and performance, participants developed their musical skills, confidence, and artistic identity while creating, recording, and performing original music. Supported by professional tutors and student mentors, they collaborated in bands, developed their own creative voice, and gained valuable insight into the music industry and future pathways within it.

Junior RNCM

Each Saturday, gifted young musicians aged 8-18 come together to develop their talent at the RNCM. This year, **190 young musicians** received a rounded programme of instrumental, composition, and conducting tuition, ensemble coaching, and academic study, providing a strong foundation for further study at conservatoire or university level. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we were able to offer **80 scholarships**, enabling talented young musicians to flourish at JRNCM.

The impact of this support is clear: almost every JRNCM leaver this year progressed to higher education, with 19 securing places at conservatoires, including 12 at the RNCM. A further 15 went on to university, while one began a career as a military musician.

JRNCM and RNCM Transitions cellist

Pathfinder

Offering a wide range of bespoke support, our Pathfinder programme helped **37 young musicians** facing barriers to musical progression. Through year-round one-to-one and group sessions, workshops, holiday schools, chamber music and improvisation projects, and practical support such as instrument purchases, participants developed their skills, confidence, and aspirations. Together, these experiences helped them take the next step in their musical journey.

RNCM Transitions

Through intensive, bespoke, rounded support, RNCM Transitions helps bridge the gap to conservatoire or university study for talented young musicians aged 15-18 who benefit from additional support. Through one-to-one lessons, mentoring, audition preparation, mock interviews, application guidance, and practical support such as exam fees and instrument purchases, participants gained the confidence, skills, and experience needed to progress successfully into higher music education.

RNCM Engage Cumbria

In the third year of this five-year programme, RNCM Engage Cumbria continued to strengthen music education across West Cumbria by supporting young people, teachers, community organisations, and future music educators.

Made possible by a transformational philanthropic gift and co-designed with Cumberland Music Service, the programme responds to local needs, addresses barriers to music education, and creates opportunities for young people to develop their musical skills.

This year, RNCM Engage Cumbria engaged **1,396 young people** through instrumental teaching, music production courses, and community music-making opportunities. The project also supported local teachers through funded places on our Master of Education (MEd) programme, strengthened community music organisations, provided bursaries for talented Cumbrian students studying at the RNCM, and gave student mentors valuable teaching and leadership experience.

A Celebration in Cumbria

In March 2026, we hosted a special celebration event at the Carnegie Theatre & Arts Centre in Workington to mark the programme's halfway point.

The event featured inspiring performances from 100 children representing our partner primary schools, showcasing the skills, creativity and confidence they have developed through the programme. Audiences also enjoyed original work created by students on the Online Production Course.

RNCM student mentors, MEd scholars, and bursary recipients from Cumbria shared their personal experiences, highlighting the programme's positive impact on individual participants, schools and the wider community.

RNCM Children's Opera

This year, 111 children from four local primary schools took centre stage in our annual Children's Opera, creating and performing an original work based on the story of *The Green Knight*, developed in collaboration with acclaimed composer Kate Pearson.

Through workshops in schools and two public performances on the RNCM Theatre stage, the project helped children develop their creativity, musical skills, and confidence. It also provided valuable training opportunities for **142 RNCM students**, who worked with and performed alongside the children in schools, on stage, and in the orchestra.

Now in its 18th year, Children's Opera has reached **more than 2,000 children**, creating lasting benefits for young people and RNCM students alike.

'I have never been on stage before and being out there was incredible. I can't thank you enough.'

Child involved in *The Green Knight*

'Parents have told me that it was the best thing they have ever seen their child do and they were amazed that they had the confidence to get up on the stage and really go for it.'

Mark, Year 5 teacher at a participating school

Honouring Kate Pearson

In December 2025, Kate Pearson was awarded Honorary Fellowship of the RNCM in recognition of the artistic, educational, and social value of her community-focused music-making, most notably through her long-standing leadership of the RNCM Children's Opera and her wider work as a composer, facilitator, and educator.

Annual Appeal

Our 2025-26 Annual Appeal raised support for the real-world training and professional experiences that help RNCM students prepare for life beyond graduation.

At the RNCM, students benefit from an unrivalled number of partnerships, placements, and performance opportunities, from artistic collaborations and healthcare placements to entrepreneurship training and paid work through our Artist Agency.

Thanks to the generosity of our Annual Appeal donors, we can continue to provide these vital experiences, helping students build the skills, confidence, and connections they need to become highly employable, industry-ready musicians.

£48,524

donated to our Annual Appeal helping to forge industry-ready musicians

'During my time at the RNCM, I've performed with both the BBC Philharmonic and Manchester Camerata – experiences that have led to professional work with leading orchestras. Thank you for helping us prepare to take our next steps into the profession.'

Marcelo Nunes Rodrigues,
double bass

Leadership Circle

Now in its second year, our Leadership Circle brings together philanthropists whose major gifts provide strategic, high-impact support.

Led by our Chair, Ravi Gupta, the collective annual generosity of the Circle helps address key priorities across the RNCM, from student financial support and capital projects to RNCM Engage initiatives that widen access to music education for children and young people. It also supports our distinctive approach to training, rooted in real-world opportunities that prepare students for sustainable careers in music, and this year helped fund the relaunched *RNCM Artist of the Year* prizes, our highest individual student award.

Members also enjoyed a special evening in London, featuring intimate performances from exceptional RNCM musicians, warm hospitality, and conversation with members of our alumni community and student body.

We are deeply grateful to members who contribute to our Leadership Circle fund for their ambition, advocacy, and belief in the future of the RNCM.

Contact rhiannon.mckay-smith@rncm.ac.uk / 0161 907 5393 to learn more.

RNCM Artist of the Year: Classical Final

Opera Circle

RNCM Opera: Janáček's The Cunning Little Vixen

Our Opera Circle continues to help us deliver high-quality, professionally resourced opera productions that are essential for training the next generation of opera singers.

These productions give our trainee opera singers invaluable experience, helping them to hone their craft, build confidence, and work with professional creative teams on full-scale productions as they prepare for careers in the industry.

In its second year, the Opera Circle welcomed five members, whose generous support of **£11,625** contributed directly to the production costs of Prokofiev's *L'amour des trois oranges* and Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

Members enjoyed unrivalled access to the creative process, taking backstage tours, hearing first-hand from creative teams, attending rehearsals and sitzprobes, and viewing costume and set designs.

They also gained deeper insight into the production process and student experience through regular video logs from principal cast members and by attending masterclasses delivered by leading opera professionals.

Contact alexandra.maliphant@rncm.ac.uk / 0161 907 5389 to learn more.

Principal's Circle

Our Principal's Circle is a dedicated community of supporters whose collective generosity has a meaningful impact on our students' experience, creating a fund that enables opportunities beyond the core curriculum.

This year, **56 members** supported with

£54,750

helping to make the following projects possible:

- **An international performance opportunity in Tuscany**, where 21 RNCM singers performed Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* under the direction of RNCM Fellow Michael Chance CBE.
- **A collaboration with the Hebrides Ensemble**, in which 14 RNCM musicians recorded chamber works by the late composer and alumna Lucy Hale.
- **The RNCM's first Poet-in-Residence programme**, which saw Louise Wallwein MBE work with students to create an original spoken-word commission alongside the RNCM Symphony Orchestra's performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*.
- **A collaboration with acclaimed cellist and alumnus Abel Selaocoe and The Bantu Ensemble**, through which 16 musicians explored improvisation and the connections between African musical heritage and Western classical traditions, culminating in a sold-out performance.
- **A composition project with Royal Albert Hall Associate Artists Rushil Ranjan and Abi Sampa**, enabling RNCM composers to create new works for Indian classical soloists and chamber ensembles, culminating in performances featuring RNCM musicians alongside members of A. R. Rahman's Sunshine Orchestra.

RNCM musicians with Abel Selaocoe

RNCM Futures

Our distinctive approach to music education combines artistic excellence with real-world experience. From professional placements and industry partnerships to entrepreneurship and international opportunities, philanthropy helps ensure our students graduate with the skills, experience, and versatility to build successful careers in music.

String Quartet Studio

Continued philanthropic support enabled our String Quartet Studio to support three ensembles through bespoke programmes tailored to their artistic development. With regular coaching, masterclasses with leading visiting artists, and dedicated rehearsal space, the quartets developed their sound, identity, and confidence as emerging professional ensembles. The new model is also inspiring younger chamber groups, establishing a clear chamber music pathway through the RNCM and beyond, into the profession.

Music and Health Professional Experience Scheme

Philanthropy helped fund placements with local music charities Jessie's Fund and Songbirds Music UK, giving **20 students** hands-on experience in Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and healthcare settings. Through specialist training, students developed confidence, empathy, adaptability, and facilitation skills, learning to use music in responsive and joyful ways with children and families, and preparing for meaningful careers in health, care, and community settings.

RNCM Creative Innovators Award

Students pitched their business ideas to a panel of industry experts, with **three winners** receiving financial support and mentoring to develop their creative projects. Winning pitches included Beyond Sight International, a platform celebrating blind and visually impaired musicians; CHIME, delivering live music sessions in children's hospices; and CURIO Music Festival, a bold new multi-genre festival in Manchester.

RNCM Creative Innovators Award Final

Orchestral Professional Experience Scheme

Philanthropic support helped RNCM students gain first-hand experience of orchestral life through our Hallé Professional Experience Scheme, part of the RNCM's wider programme of industry partnerships. Following competitive auditions, coaching, and performances alongside Hallé musicians, **10 students** were invited to join the Hallé's extras list, providing a vital route into paid freelance work and supporting the transition from conservatoire training into the profession.

Inspirational Artists Series

Thanks to generous trust support, the second year of our Inspirational Artists Series brought ground-breaking artists to the RNCM to share their expertise not only as performers, but as storytellers, collaborators, and innovators. Artists including Attacca Quartet, Alice Sara Ott, Seth Parker Woods, Candoco Dance Company, and Manchester Collective enriched our performance programme while working directly with students through workshops, masterclasses, and side-by-side performances.

Williams-Howard Prize

Five students won financial prizes, coaching, and a festival performance opportunity at this year's competition, established to celebrate the study and performance of art songs by composers of the African diaspora.

Students rehearsing in LA

Showcasing Excellence in LA

With funding secured, **seven students** represented the RNCM in Los Angeles as part of the largest-ever UK trade mission to the USA. Performing across the campaign, including in a showcase featuring musicians from both our Popular Music and Classical programmes, they represented the very best of UK conservatoire training on a global stage.

Masterclass Series

As part of our wider programme of masterclasses, long-term support enabled **14 singers** and **nine pianists** to work with an International Visiting Professor, exploring song and opera inspired by the golden age of film and theatre music, and promoting cross-school collaboration.

Legacy Giving

Every year, we are honoured to be remembered by donors, alumni, staff, and music lovers who choose to leave a gift to the RNCM in their will. This remarkable generosity has a transformative impact, helping future generations of young musicians to flourish.

This has been one of the most significant years for alumni legacy giving in the RNCM's recent history, including three extraordinary gifts from alumni of the RNCM and our founding institutions, the Northern School of Music and Royal Manchester College of Music.

£977,277

generously gifted in wills

We are hugely grateful to everyone who has chosen to remember the RNCM in their will. If you would like to make us aware of your plans, **please contact Sarah Peach at legacies@rncm.ac.uk or 0161 907 5387.** We would love to thank you and share the impact of your support during your lifetime, including invitations to our annual RNCM Legacy Club event.

Donations and Regular Giving

Every gift to the RNCM makes a difference. From regular donations and ticket top-ups to seat naming and our growing Membership scheme, this support helps our students to thrive, and we are deeply grateful.

£20,444

donated via direct debit and standing orders by
69 generous supporters

£10,573

raised through Box Office donations when booking to see performances at the RNCM

200 Members supported with

£7,118

5 seats

named across our Concert Hall and Theatre

'Being RNCM Members has truly enriched our lives. We're constantly inspired by the talent, quality, and youthful enthusiasm on stage. Where else can you experience such musical excellence across so many genres? It's a privilege to be Members.'

Anne and Mike

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